Blair BASICS
Educator/Employer Workshop
Keynote Address
May 1, 2012
Remarks of President Tom Foley

Thank you Joe Hurd, for that nice introduction. This is my second visit to a Blair County Chamber Business and Education event in the last year and I applaud you and I thank you for this concentrated attention to such an important partnership.

This morning, I would like to pursue a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 agenda with you. I want to issue one disclaimer, make two introductory comments, outline three paradigm shifts, discuss the four pronged approach that Mount Aloysius takes to those paradigm shifts and finally I’d like to leave you with five tools that I hope will assist you in the important work that you do.

First, the disclaimer. I am married to a middle/high school teacher and brother to an elementary school teacher with almost 40 years in the classroom. One of my favorite nieces is about to get her Masters in Counseling. I am the parent of three young men who had very happy and successful public school experiences (especially with their guidance counselor). And I am the first in a first generation college family of twelve to have the opportunity to go away to college. Eleven of the twelve of us received college degrees and the twelfth is a carpenter (so he is doing just fine, thank you very much).

I had the chance to tell Maureen Calandra this part of the story earlier—although my brothers and sisters were very successful athletes and good at many other pursuits, the wall that you see when you entered my parent’s family room isn’t filled with trophies or plaques commemorating those achievements. It was lined with the diplomas. That was a consistent message in our house, the message from parents who had not had the opportunity for a college education and grandparents some of whom did not have the opportunity for a grade school education. So I come before you this morning with a definite bias in favor of education and for the important work that you do every day. I believe strongly in teacher/astronaut Christa McAuliffe’s oft quoted statement, describing her life in the classroom, that “I touch the future. I teach.”

Two introductory comments. First, I am well aware of the complex of issues that you are called upon to address these days—concerns that never even dawned on me in my day. If you look at the chart on the screen, you will notice everything from what I call “high stakes testing,” which I know includes PSSA’s and the No Child Left Behind Act through the increasing ambiguity between the roles of both guidance counselors and principals, to “security” (Columbine was not a word in our vocabulary prior to the last decade), even to issues that concern the increasingly complex array of choices for post high school education and the even more
complex array of financial options for financing that education. Your jobs have become more complex over time but especially over the last decade. I want to assure all of you that my niece just made sure that I understood that and even insisted that I read a dissertation on the evolution of the job of guidance counselor over the last 100 years.

My second introductory comment is that even with all those changes, fundamentally the job of everyone in this room remains “to develop young people” in three ways—personally/socially, academically, and career-wise. There is perhaps a bit more emphasis on the third for guidance counselors but whether you are a principal, an HR Director or a guidance counselor in a school in this county my sense is that you focus on one or all of these three important topics: the personal and social development of young people, the academic development of these students and the career education of these students.

In a very real sense, that is our focus at Mount Aloysius as well. These young people are not finished products as we all know (as none of us are) even when they arrive at our gate.

Number three, I want to brief you on three--let me be so bold as to call them paradigm shifts--that I think influence, perhaps even have a hold, over the work that all of us do.

First, there is a paradigm shift in the way our students see the world, and what tools they employ to get that view. Take my word for it—things moved fast when we were young but never so fast as now.

Couple of quick examples—first example, the nightly news. In my youth, news happened once a day for a half hour on one of three channels. For today’s youth, news is a 24/7 business with competing infotainment networks that literally never go off the air. Just look at this list of issues that today’s kids think about—largely driven by their incidental exposure to the news—that I can tell you were not a part of my daily concerns at their age.

Second example, the general perceptions about the low levels of political conversation in America. The Annenberg School recently studied an entire year’s worth of instances of uncivil discourse in public life. They concluded that the number of instances today of uncivil behavior in public life probably isn’t greater in number or any more vitriolic than they were as far back as the Revolutionary War.

For example, one politician was described in print as “treacherous in private friendship... and a hypocrite in public life.” That was Tom Paine talking about George Washington more than two centuries ago. But Tom Paine’s opinion pieces only came out once a month and his distribution network was not exactly “revolutionary.” Today, a single act of bad behavior—verbal or otherwise—by a figure in public life is repeated endlessly on competing networks with different spins and points of emphasis.

Young people are left to figure out how to deal with all that hot air—whether they want to or not—as it is thrust at their subconscious sometimes from their TVs, their laptops, their iPhones and even their own Facebook pages.

Point here is a simple one—kids today are confronted with far more choices at far earlier ages than we were—it’s the abundance of choices before their value systems and character are even remotely fully formed that astounds them. And us.
Let me demonstrate this in a couple of slides. One of my favorite resources is the Beloit College Mindset List, which reflects the worldview of first year college students. These slides show just a few of the “cultural touchstones” that mark the Class of 2015. The mindset is literally very different.

Let me come at it from another direction. Here is a list of things that the kids you are teaching are determined never to pay for—it that doesn’t show a different and determined worldview, I’m not sure what does. Finally, here is a picture of me thinking (or at least pretending to). Calming water, isolation, setting sun. Here is one of your kids or a Mt Aloysius student. Seven different pieces of technology hooked up to them—while they are sleeping. They would argue this is helping them to sleep.

So, paradigm shift number one. When Yeats, writing of the revolutionary Ireland of his time said that “the world has changed, changed utterly,” he meant over the course of a century. Now it might be in the course of a single 24 hour news cycle.

The second paradigm shift has to do with communications. In my day, communication WAS in person, one on one, and most likely verbal and vocal. Now, it IS almost never in person, rarely one on one (more likely shared with many), and only very, rarely verbal and vocal.

We live in an era when “MySpace” is already old space, where “email” is the new “snail mail,” where the first association with the word “web” is not “spider”, and where a foreign government—Egypt’s, entrenched for 40 years—can be toppled by a thousand protesters armed with smart phones, Facebook accounts and a common cause. The keyboard—faster than the pen and still mightier than the sword. My goodness, if Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest country in the world.

These new forms of communication have allowed each of us to redefine ourselves in much more than simply a nationalistic sense. Bonds of friendship, commonality, and cause are forged, tested, and strengthened instantaneously across schools, communities, heck even across oceans and often without a single in-person encounter. And make no mistake, these developments in the technology of communications are like tectonic shifts under the very ground on which education rests—as NYU President John Sexton put it, “on the fields of knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination.”

In higher education today, we all come late to the party, trying to keep pace with developments we couldn’t even imagine—not just a generation ago—how about a year ago. I saw a video recently of a Good Samaritan somewhere in the Third World building a well by following the directions on his IPAD mounted on a dirt pile next to him. I saw a movie last year in Altoona where a teenager dialed up his blackberry to figure out how to pick a lock. The ripple effects of all these examples of “higher” education— how to peacefully overthrow a government, how to pick a lock, how to build a well—are not unrelated to what we do at Mt Aloysius every day and are directly related to what you must do to prepare your students for when they leave your school systems.

Let me show you a few slides that underline this observation. First, let me show you a timeline— by centuries—of new communication tools. Notice how much shorter is the time frame for brand new developments in the last century or two.
Second, this is a timeline of how long it took for each new communication development to reach 50M users. Same pattern—took the Gutenberg printing press 500 years. Takes a new video from a favorite performer perhaps an hour.

Next, this is a clock that simply looks at what happens in terms of electronic communications every sixty seconds.

And don’t think all this data is just sitting out there—here is a chart on how often people check in with all this info through all these mediums.

Paradigm shift number two—the very nature of interpersonal communications has changed, perhaps irrevocably.

The third paradigm shift has to do with the status of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning was a buzz phrase twenty years ago—something to aspire towards. Now, it is no longer the prerogative of the educated few, lifelong learning is now the mandate for all who wish to get a better job, or just keep the one they have.

You know, 43% of our students at Mt Aloysius are in nursing or allied health fields. I want to ask each of you to think about the last time you went to the hospital. Did you see anyone carrying a chart or putting one in a slot at the bottom of your bed? Probably not, because as soon as the doctor or the nurse or the surg tech or the medical assistant finished treating you, they turned around to a laptop device mounted on the wall in your room or the hallway, and recorded their comments through a software program that will share them hospital-wide and add them instantly to your permanent record. Welcome to the 21st century in the hospital and at Mt Aloysius. And that particular transition—from unreadable doctor prose to legible, transparent, instantly messenged diagnoses and treatment plans—happened like that (snaps fingers).

Did you know that the majority of the jobs that will be filled by today’s elementary school students don’t even exist today? How will those kids or our students prepare for such change? Whether they are going to work in a manufacturing plant like the McLanahan Corporation, take over as warden at the federal prison in Cresson, run a nursing division at Altoona Regional Health Systems, or serve as rehab specialist at the Hiram G. Andrews Center, our graduates will have to “know how to know,” as former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich puts it. We understand that their experience at Mt Aloysius must be the lynchpin for lifelong learning—so they can keep pace in their first professions, and prepare for whole new ones.

Let me show you a few slides here. First is a look at how I did research in my day—Periodical Guide to Literature, and maybe 20 sources like you see arrayed here. Here is how they do it—every one of those icons represents a whole different search engine, and there are perhaps hundreds of thousands of these out there right now. And one more if they don’t like what they find here—they go to one of these—all social media sites that let them ask likeminded people, friends, experts or the random public where they will find the best data/info on any given topic.

Today, at Mt Aloysius, we can order up a syllabus from MIT or Misericordia simply by going online. And it’s free. It’s never been our way here at Mt Aloysius to have classes with even more than 30 students, and we average 14. But the days of Big State U and their 100-student classes, and droning lectures in halls with 300 pre-med majors are over. At Mt Aloysius, we already offer hybrid classes where students can pause, fast forward or even re-watch parts of lectures on our “smart boards” and we are already teaching continuing ed classes where you can
interact at the speed of twitter with 10 other students—everyone can comment and see others comments much faster than if they were taking turns speaking out loud. Our son Matt’s MBA class here is engaged in a semester long project with a group of architects in Quito, Ecuador—through the magic of Skype.

Are we up to the technology challenge at Mt Aloysius? You bet we are. We have more simulation labs and more high tech robot-ikins than any nursing school from State College all the way to Pittsburgh. 61% of all our classrooms are wired with the latest smart technology. YouTube is already old hat at Mt Aloysius, where word-heavy public reports are quickly converted into readable on-line magazines, complete with shimmering visuals, feedback functions and handy links for “deep divers.” Last fall, we christened a new Technology Council whose mission is to keep us on top of all the implications of these new technologies for pedagogy, for internal and external communications, for recruitment and for advancement strategies. And we just opened this year our own Social Media Lab in the basement of a 110 year old building—we call it the “Digital Grotto” (I love the double irony here) --so that our students and our faculty have the newest education tools on the market.

At Mt Aloysius, we have long produced graduates who are both job-ready and community-ready. Now, we need them to be technology-ready—to be as fluent in the new technologies of communications and education as they are in community service and service learning, in physical therapy and secondary education, in biology and criminology, in radiation science and political science. Those new tools are the key to their lifelong learning.

So now we are adding a third leg to what I call the Mt Aloysius Compact. We work to produce graduates who are not just job-ready, not just prepared to engage in community, but we will produce graduates who are technology-ready as well, because that is the only way to fulfill the promise behind the founding of this institution—to respond to the needs of the people and of the region. The Mt Aloysius Compact—job-ready, community-ready and technology-ready.

Now let me turn your attention to four strategies that we deploy at Mt Aloysius to deal with these three paradigm shifts

One, we build community, at school, town and gown and in the larger world;

Two, we work to inculcate a passion for lifelong learning, whether it’s back at school (or in another location) and at homecoming we advertise a “homecoming of the mind” as well as all the traditional homecoming activities;

Three, we invest in technology so we can meet our students where they are;

Four, we encourage and exemplify “civil” discourse because that is where the educational “rubber” meets the learning curve in the “road.”
Just a few words on each. On **building community**, we stretch the lines between serious and just plain fun, we do it on and off campus, we are both inside and “outside the box” and “the comfort zone” with our mix of activities.

We also build community through service at school and in the community. It is a fundamental part of who we are—100% of our students and every club, team and organization engages in it; and you can see some samples in this slide of the “AMCC Recognition.” Last semester alone, over 800 students (well over 50% of our FTEs) donated 4,733 hours to 130 different projects with 123 community partners.

The **passion for lifelong learning** is a core message for us at Mt Aloysius—we get you ready for your first job—but you have to be committed to life-long learning to be ready for the next job (or even the second year in your first job).

**Technology** is at the heart of both our admissions strategy and our educational method. You can see multiple uses of social media in our daily communication efforts with prospective students. Our admissions website was judged 8th best in the entire northeast United States—from among all colleges and universities— in a recent analysis of same. Mt Aloysius got high marks for access, variety, authenticity (lots of videos that aren’t just ads for the College I think), transparency and in a category that evaluated timeliness (how often do we update).

Similarly, it is central to classroom efforts, as I mentioned earlier. For the seven principle ways that we integrate technology into our daily educational experience—through direct communication, collaboration with other institutions and sources, substantive content, subject matter organization, formal assessment efforts, and with equipment designed to assist those with special needs of one kind or another. Our strategic plan builds around these seven principles.

Finally, we work to **exemplify and promote civility**—you can’t learn if you don’t listen. The College recently completed a year-long focus on the topic—from orientation sessions that focused on how to civilly resolve differences with roommates to major lectures on civil discourse in public life on the internet, etc. those efforts own national recognition for the College from several commentators and we made the top ten list (twice!) for best practices on college campuses (#1 and 4!!) that relate to civil discourse.

We try to walk the walk at the Mount in responding to those three key paradigm shifts, not just talk the talk.

**Finally, I want to leave you with five tools** that I think will help the work that so many of you do. Chamber President Hurd referenced a previous life when I served as Secretary of Labor and Industry in the Commonwealth of PA. In that capacity about twenty years ago we produced the first ever “Career Resource Guide”. This was a guide intended for high school guidance counselors and students, and its purpose was to provide some educational materials relative to career education. Here is the very first edition of the Career Resource Guide from the Commonwealth of PA and is signed by Governor Robert P. Casey and by myself. It’s a good document, it contains articles on the importance of community service, about the variety of good jobs available in Pennsylvania, about what a student needs to do to prepare for these good jobs.
I am now holding up and you can see on the screen the 2012 version of the Career Resource Guide. And I must tell you that Governor Corbett and his team have produced a much better document than we delivered to you twenty years ago. It has some excellent teaching materials in it—I would venture to day if you actually teach a class on careers this document is your curriculum. I want to reference five specific tools that appear in this document. First is the cover page of the document and you can see the website there www.dli@state.pa.us. Here is a nice letter from Governor Corbett at the introduction of the document.

Now I want to reference five specific tools that are available in this document. The first tool is what I’ve renamed the myth versus the reality tool, and what it does is outline the attractive fun jobs that our young people see on TV all the time. Chefs, crime scene investigators, homicide detectives, etc., and lays out exactly how many of those jobs are available on an annual basis in Pennsylvania. So the bad news for our young people who love the variety of chef shows on TV right now is that there are only seventy-one new chef jobs each year. The numbers aren’t much better for the rank of detective and they are even worse for forensic investigators like Gil Grisham and Jethro Leroy Gibbs. I think this is a good tool for bringing our kids back to reality at the very beginning of the career education process.

The second tool is an assessment tool. You are all well aware of dozens of these kinds of career and interest assessment tests. I like this one especially. It’s very simple, gives the kids a quick sense—as long as they are honest with themselves when they answer these questions—of where their skills and interests match up with the skills and interests of people in given professions. It doesn’t take long to fill out and there is some interesting thought provoking questions that are part of it.

The next tool is the generic jobs tool. In the Career Research Guide, there are descriptions of job types across an entire generic spectrum—for example, health industry or the environmental industry or the manufacturing industry. There are also interviews with young people who have recent experience in each of those industries, and it gives the students a better handle on what is involved in that particular industry.

The fourth tool is a specific job tool. You can see from the chart it lays out very specifically by job type what the education and skills requirements are, how many of those jobs are available, where in particular they exist in the commonwealth, etc. as you go across the nature of this spreadsheet. It’s excellent and this is real data that is produced by the State Department of Labor and Industry and by the United States Department of Labor.

The last and final tool is a timeline or a chronology tool and this is designed to move our students through a process—month to month—in their senior year in evaluating and doing the leg work necessary to reach whatever they feel is the next appropriate step for them. Again, it’s an excellent tool, well designed and well put together, perfect for a curriculum but also perfect for an aggressive student who know what he or she wants. It clearly outlines what he should do in November, in December, in January, in February, etc. So I commend this tool to you and it’s available on the website as well as in hard copy.

Let me finish with a story about a postal worker. A postal worker comes across a letter that is addressed to God. He was fairly used to getting letters addressed to Santa Claus but this is the first one he’d ever had one addressed “To God.” He decided to open it and found the following
“Dear God, as you know this has been a particular tough year and we are not able to get any gifts for our son Jimmy. If you could see your way to sending us ten dollars that should be more than enough to ensure a happy Christmas for Jimmy. Thank you.” And it was signed.

The postman was so moved by this letter that he took out another envelope and wrote “From God” on it and took all the money that he had in his wallet—which was six dollars—and put it in the envelope and stuck it in the mailbox.

You can imagine the next day how excited he was to see if there would be any response. He opened the box and sure enough there was a letter to God and in the letter it said “Dear God, thank you so much for listening to our plea and reaching out to help us. Though I know I asked for ten dollars I want you to know there was only six in the envelope. And I know exactly where the other four dollars went, those SOB’s at the Post Office.”

Well I know that’s how it is sometimes in your profession. No matter how much good work you do there’s always someone around to blame you for the imperfections that make our students human and ultimately whole.

I thank you for your work every day. I am a strong believer in the adage that “a school building is just four walls with tomorrow inside.” And when you have those “postal worker” days, I hope that the inspiration of that adage stays with you. You really do have “tomorrow inside” your school buildings. I thank you for your attention to each and every one of your students and to these remarks today.